

I. Introduction:

The World Health Organization and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention developed the *Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS)* Project to track tobacco use among youth in countries across the world, using a common methodology and core questionnaire. The GYTS is school based and employs a two-stage sample design to produce representative data on smoking among students approximately aged 13-15 years. The first stage consists of a probabilistic selection of schools, and the second consists of a random selection of classes from the participating schools. All students in the selected classes are eligible for the survey (1).

WHO Resolution

Between 1970 and 1995, WHO adopted 14 resolutions on the need for both national and international tobacco control policies. Four of the 14 resolutions are relevant to the UNF-project—Global Youth Tobacco (GYTS) Survey. Member states were encouraged to implement comprehensive tobacco control strategies that contain the following:

- 1.) Measures to ensure that non-smokers receive effective protection, to which they are entitled, from involuntary exposure to tobacco smoke.
- 2.) Measures to promote abstention from the use of tobacco so as to protect children and young people from becoming addicted.
- 3.) The establishment of programmes of education and public information on tobacco and health issues, including smoking cessation programmes, with active involvement of the health professions and the media.
- 4.) Monitoring trends in smoking and other forms of tobacco use, tobacco-related diseases, and effectiveness of national smoking control action.

Public Health Impact^a

Despite widespread knowledge of the harm caused by smoking, only modest success has been achieved in global tobacco control initiatives. WHO estimates that there are currently 3.5 million deaths a year from tobacco, a figure expected to rise to about 10 million by 2030(1). By that date, 70% of those deaths will occur in developing countries.

^aTobacco use by youth: a surveillance report from the Global Youth Tobacco Survey project, WHO Bulletin, 2000, 78

Tobacco use is considered to be one of the chief preventable causes of deaths in the world. Most people begin using tobacco before the age of 18(2,3). Recent trends indicate that the smoking prevalence rate among adolescents is rising; and age of initiation is becoming younger. If these patterns continue, tobacco use will result in the deaths of 250 million children and young people alive today, many of them in developing countries (4). Therefore, adolescents and school-aged children should be a primary focus for intervention strategies. Carefully designed surveys should provide a clear picture of the risk factor for behaviors of young and school-aged children, which then can be used to set up more effective and comprehensive tobacco, control policies.

Tobacco Use in the Philippines

The latest surveys (5) in the Philippines indicate that one of every three adult Filipinos currently smoke, 33% of country's adult population. Another 13% count themselves as ex-smokers. Of the 74 million Filipinos in 1999, therefore, as much as 34 million have been directly exposed to risks for cancer and other diseases related to tobacco-use. While little less than half of all Filipino adults actually use tobacco, however, their smoking directly affects at least 60% of all households in the Philippines. Only four out of ten Philippine households are smoke-free. With an average of 5.1 members per household, there would be approximately 35 million passive smokers in the country (6).

Tobacco use in Filipino youth is alarming. About 30% of adolescents in the urban areas smoke, and of these, more than 70% started smoking between the ages 13-15 (7). On a national level, the study says that, as much as 40% of boys and 19% of girls aged 10-14 are already daily smokers. The age 15-19, 38% of both male and female Filipinos are already considered regular smokers.

The WHO expects their numbers to continue to climb. Tobacco companies are aggressively marketing cigarettes to their children-to the extent of giving them sample packs for free- hoping to make them addicted to nicotine and thus ensure a continuing market for tobacco.

BACKGROUND OF THE GLOBAL YOUTH TOBACCO SURVEY

UNF Project

The Tobacco Free Initiative (TFI) /WHO was awarded by the United Nations Foundation for International Partnerships (UNFIP) as a tobacco prevention grant

^bWhite Paper on Tobacco, Senate Committee on Health & Demography, Philippines, 1999